

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

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### Statement

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#### Testimony by Rep. Mike Thompson (CA-1)

HR 2798 - Pacific Salmon Recovery Act of 1999

May 18, 2000

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HR 2798, the Pacific Salmon Recovery Act of 1999. I appreciate the Subcommittee's continuing leadership on the fishery issues of the Pacific Northwest. I am also grateful to Chairman Young, Ranking Member Miller and the other Members of both the full and Subcommittee who have co-sponsored this legislation, and to Chairman Saxton for organizing today's hearing.

I would also like to thank the witnesses who have taken the time and effort to testify on this measure, many of whom have traveled thousands of miles to be with us today. In particular, I would like to thank Supervisor Tim Smith of Sonoma County, California for his continuing dedication to this issue.

Salmon and steelhead trout long have been a critical component of the culture and economy of the Pacific Northwest. The port towns of the West Coast grew up around the salmon industry and served as the backbone for many of our communities.

However, times have been tough for these communities as the fisheries have gone into decline. While salmon are still an integral part of the culture of my district, decades of water diversions, dam building, overfishing, and urban development have had a terrible impact on the rivers and streams of the Pacific Northwest. By the late 1990s, West Coast salmon abundance had declined to only 10% of what it had been in the 1800s. California's Trinity River system alone has lost more than 80% of its King Salmon and more than 60% of its Steelhead Trout over the past 50 years. In the Central Valley, 70-90 percent of historical spawning and rearing habitat has been lost.

According to the American Fisheries Society, at least 214 Pacific Coast anadromous fish populations are "at risk," while at least 106 other historically abundant populations have already become extinct. Twenty-six distinct population segments of Pacific salmon and sea-run trout are listed as either endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). California alone accounts for twelve of those listings. In January, yet

another California steelhead population was proposed for a federal ESA listing.

With the commercial harvesting of coho salmon completely illegal in my state and other species not far behind, hundreds of our fishing families have been forced out of business. Many of our local economies have subsequently suffered. As recently as 1988, sport and commercial salmon fishing in the Pacific region generated more than \$1.25 billion for our regional economy. Since then, salmon fishing closures have contributed to the loss of nearly 80% of our region's job base, with a total salmon industry loss over the past 30 years of approximately 72,000 family wage jobs.

In 1998, the governors of the California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska made a joint appeal to create a

\$200 million fund for coastal salmon restoration with funds to be divided equally among the participating states. The Administration responded in the FY 2000 budget with a request for \$100 million. Under the initial House budget, the salmon recovery program was zeroed out. Funding was restored in conference with the Senate but, when the final package went to the President in October, only \$9 million was included for California.

Once again, the Administration's budget request includes \$100 million for the salmon recovery program in this year's budget, this time under the Lands Legacy Initiative. While this request is critically important, I believe our efforts need to be expanded.

Late last year, I introduced HR 2798, the Pacific Salmon Recovery Act of 1999. This measure would authorize \$200 million in federal assistance to the four Pacific states for the restoration of salmon and anadromous trout habitat, as requested by the four governors. More important, it would guarantee equal funding among the four states and would require broad conditions under which the money must be spent while allowing maximum flexibility to each state in setting priorities.

At a minimum, use of the funds must be consistent with the goal of salmon recovery, establish specific goals and timelines for activities funded with such assistance, and include measurable criteria by which such activities may be evaluated.

The bill also requires that activities carried out with funds from this program be scientifically based, cost effective, contribute to the protection or restoration of salmon, and not be conducted on private land except with the consent of the owner of the land.

Other provisions include tight restrictions on agency overhead costs, a requirement to provide public participation in the grant-making process, and assigning priority to those species that are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The \$9 million allotted to California last year was extremely important, but there is no reasonable justification for our state receiving less than an equal share of available funds. With a dozen endangered species listings to contend with, California is in as much need as the other Pacific coastal states. This bill would require that the funds for salmon restoration be distributed equally among the participating states.

Early efforts at the state level have begun the process of reversing the decline of our salmon economy. Private landowners, conservation groups, and industry have committed to the lengthy process of repairing the damage done. It is now time for the federal government to make its own commitment to salmon restoration.

We will never return to what was once "business as usual." However, by stabilizing and restoring our salmon numbers through habitat recovery, we can lessen the regulatory pressure on industry and reduce the risk of new surprises. We must demonstrate our support for state, local, and private efforts to halt the decline of Pacific Salmon by fully funding the federal contribution of salmon restoration efforts.

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